

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

**GUIDANCE FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)**

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## 1. ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)

- 1.1 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the process by which the University gives credit against learning achieved by an individual before entry to a programme of study.
- 1.2 Such prior learning may have been previously assessed and certificated by an education provider (for example, by another institution of Higher Education). Recognition of this kind of learning is known as the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning or APCL. It may also have been acquired outside the formal education and training systems (for example, through work experience) and would therefore be recognised by the process of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning or APEL.
- 1.3 Credit is a means by which learning outcomes are quantified in terms of notional study hours at a given level. Learning outcomes are used to identify whether students have demonstrated, normally through assessment, the minimum level of learning required to pass a module and thus gain credit. Partial credit is not accepted (e.g. if 50% of the learning outcomes of a 20-credit module is achieved but the module failed, the student does not receive 10-credits).
- 1.4 Regulation 5.1.2(c) confirms the maximum amount of credit that can be claimed under APL.
- 1.5 Exempted module/s (be they core or option modules) stated on the APL decision form will only be those offered within the current programme of study for which the applicant has applied and is seeking partial exemption.
- 1.6 An application for admission to a programme of study is different from an APL application and it is the responsibility of the applicant to apply for both. Applicants must make their application to the programme first, before submitting a claim for APL.
- 1.7 Admissions will carry out the initial processing of APL applications, including the administration of the application fee.
- 1.8 Admissions will check the APL decision received from the College (including verifying that the module information provided is accurate) and raise any queries as appropriate.

## 2. ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR CERTIFICATED LEARNING (APCL)

- 2.1 The Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (or APCL) denotes the recognition of learning that has been previously assessed and certificated by an education provider (for example, by another institution of Higher Education).
- 2.2 Applicants are welcome to make a claim for exemption from a module on the basis of previously accrued credit with a credit-value greater than that module. For example, an applicant could claim exemption from a module worth 20 credits on the basis of a previously completed module worth 40 credits.
- 2.3 It is not possible to make an APCL claim for exemption from a module worth 20 credits at level H (Honours) on the basis of a previously awarded 20 credits at Level I (Intermediate).

However, an applicant could make a claim for a Level I module on the basis of a previously awarded 20 credits at level H or 20 credits at Level M (Masters), provided that there is a match in terms of module content and it can be demonstrated that the learning outcomes have been met

- 2.4 Where it is determined that there is not equivalency between the applicant's previous studies and the University's module(s), no award of credit will be made.

### **3. HOW AND WHEN TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR APCL**

- 3.1 Individuals who wish to make a claim for the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning are required to complete an APCL application form. The application form is available to download from <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/students/admissions/apl-form.pdf>.
- 3.2 Regulation 5.1.2 (a) states that applications for APCL must be made before entry to a programme of study (i.e. the commencement date of the course/programme). The time limit applied for this is one month prior to the commencement date of the University of Birmingham course the applicant is claiming credit towards. For example, if the course is due to commence on 30 September the Admissions Manager should receive the application no later than 30 August. There is no guarantee that APL applications received after this point will be processed.
- 3.3 Applicants who are unsure whether or not their previous studies are a close enough match to the University of Birmingham qualification towards which they are claiming credit are welcome to contact the relevant course Admissions Tutor for an informal discussion prior to submitting a claim for APCL.
- 3.4 Applicants who intend to make an APCL claim on the basis of previous studies that are more than five years old should consult with the relevant Admissions Tutor to determine whether a claim is still appropriate. If applicants are advised to pursue a claim on the basis of studies that are out-of-date they will be required to complete an additional statement of currency to be submitted with their APCL application form.
- 3.5 Applicants to apprenticeship programmes do not need to make a claim for APCL as this will be covered by the additional information they are asked to provide as part of the application process for apprenticeship programmes.

### **4. ASSESSMENT OF APCL CLAIMS**

- 4.1 Initial Processing of the Application
- 4.1.1 Upon receipt of the application form the Admissions Manager with responsibility for APL will ensure that there is sufficient evidence to process the claim. If the application form is incomplete, if the applicant has failed to enclose adequate supporting documentation or if there are any queries about the applicant's previous studies the Admissions Manager will contact the applicant. The application will not be processed until such time as the applicant has provided the required evidence.

- 4.1.2 If the applicant's claim is based on previous studies completed at Birmingham the Admissions Manager will check that there is a record of the applicant's completed modules on the Banner database and print a copy of the record to go with the application form.
- 4.1.3 In some circumstances it may also be necessary for the Admissions Manager to contact the applicant's prior Educational Institution for information about their studies. For example, more detailed evidence about course content than is available in a standard course syllabus may be required.
- 4.1.4 Once the Admissions Manager is happy the application for APCL is complete, the application form will be sent to the relevant admissions tutor or APL contact within the College along with an APCL decision form. The admissions tutor/College APL contact will make an initial assessment of the application and determine if there is sufficient supporting evidence to enable him or her to make a decision. If not they will ask the Admissions Manager to request additional evidence from the applicant, or make further enquiries themselves as appropriate.

## 4.2 Decision Making

- 4.2.1 The relevant admissions tutor and/or College APL contact will assess the APCL claim and, once they have made a decision, complete the APCL decision form and return it to the Admissions Manager along with the APCL application papers. If credit is to be awarded, they will state on the decision form the amount and level of credit to be granted, the amount of credit to be completed for award of the University of Birmingham qualification and the title and codes of any modules from which the applicant is to be exempted. For example, a College might decide to award an applicant 40 Masters level credits towards a PG Dip, which would exempt the applicant from taking specified modules worth 40 credits, leaving them 80 credits to successfully complete in order to be awarded the PG Dip.

## 4.3 Notification of the Decision

- 4.3.1 The relevant Admissions Tutor contact will complete the APL decision form and return it to the Admissions. The level and amount of any credit to be awarded, the credit required for the award and the titles and codes of the exempted modules must be stated on the decision form, with reasons for the decision.
- 4.3.2 Admissions will notify the applicant of the College's decision in writing.
- 4.3.3 If the application for APCL is successful the letter will state the amount of credit to be awarded and the titles of any exempted modules.
- 4.3.4 These exempted modules will be entered into the applicant's student record as APL modules by staff within Academic and Student Administration and will appear as such on student transcripts. Modules exempted via APCL appear on student transcripts as a 'Pass' but without a mark.

- 4.3.5 The Admissions Manager will copy the decision letter to colleagues in Academic and Student Administration and the Finance Office so that the applicant's tuition fees can be adjusted.
- 4.3.6 If the application is unsuccessful reasons for the decision will be given in the letter.
- 4.3.7 If the APCL claim is successful Admissions will be unable to send the applicant a decision letter until such time as they are holding an unconditional offer of a place on the University of Birmingham course they are claiming credit towards.
- 4.3.8 Due to the varied nature of APCL claims decision times will vary. However, as a guide applicants should expect to receive a decision on their application in approximately 4-6 weeks (provided the application is complete when it is received by Admissions). If no decision is received within this time applicants are welcome to contact the Admissions Manager with responsibility for APL to check on the status of their application.
- 4.3.9 However, the applicant's previously completed studies must have been passed with satisfactory grades to be eligible for APCL.

#### 4.4 APCL Costs

- 4.4.1 The non-refundable fee for processing an APCL application is £25, payable upon submission of the application for credit. This fee is waived for credit that has been obtained at the University of Birmingham.
- 4.4.2 If the claim is successful, the tuition fees will be reduced by the cost of any exempted modules.
- 4.4.3 Academic and Student Administration will calculate any reduction in tuition fees after an APCL decision letter has been sent to the applicant and their student record adjusted accordingly. If the decision has not been reached at the at the point of registration when fees become liable, the student will be required to pay the full fee amount. Any credit accepted after this date will be refunded accordingly.

### 5. ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL)

- 5.1 The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the process by which credit is given for learning acquired outside formal education and training systems. By their nature, these forms of learning (such as experienced gained through work or business) are not normally evidenced by transcripts and certificates.
- 5.2 The APEL process seeks to assess the eligibility of an individual's previous experience for entry with credit, not to assess the experience itself.
- 5.3 Where it is determined that there is not equivalency between the applicant's learning acquired outside of formal education and the University's module(s), no award of credit will be made.

## 6. HOW AND WHEN TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR APEL

- 6.1 Applicants should contact the relevant Admissions Tutor for the programme they wish to study to discuss the appropriateness of their experience outside of formal education.
- 6.2 The Admissions Tutor should make an initial assessment of the relevancy of the individuals' prior learning to the learning outcomes of the modules for which they are seeking exemption. If, after consideration of this information (and possibly interviewed the candidate), it is recommended that the applicant produce a portfolio for assessment. The Admissions Tutor must check that the applicant is holding an Unconditional offer of a place (or is to be offered an Unconditional offer) on the University of Birmingham course which they are claiming credit towards before starting work on the portfolio.
- 6.3 As per the process for APCL, students making an APEL application must not do so until after they have made an application for admission to the Birmingham course they wish to claim credit towards.
- 6.4 If advised to do so by the Admissions Tutor, the applicant will need to formally submit the portfolio of evidence. This needs to be sent to Admissions in the first instance, which will then be forwarded to the Admissions Tutor.

## 7. ASSESSMENT OF APEL CLAIMS

### 7.1 Support

- 7.1.1 The amount of support an applicant may require to complete the APEL application process will vary, given the variety and nature of the subject matter.
- 7.1.2 Applicants should contact the Admissions Tutor in the first instance with queries regarding APEL.
- 7.1.3 It should be made clear to applicants from the outset of the process the amount of support they can expect to receive whilst undertaking the assessment phase of the application.
- 7.1.4 Applicants who proceed to portfolio are expected to liaise with their specified contact within the College in order to obtain guidance and to agree a deadline for submission. The College will ensure that applicants who are allowed to produce a portfolio receive adequate guidance about what is required before starting work (structure, word length etc.)

### 7.2 Methods of Assessment

- 7.2.1 Although less easy to assess than prior certificated learning, there are various methods Colleges can use to evaluate prior experiential learning and determine whether an applicant has met the learning outcomes of the module/s for which they are seeking exemption.

7.2.2 The APEL applicant must be made aware from the outset of all methods of assessment to be used by Colleges in the evaluation of their claim.

#### 7.2.3 Portfolio

- a. One of the most commonly used assessment tools in Higher Educational Institutions is a portfolio of evidence. A portfolio must be well organised and presented and demonstrate (via commentary and analysis) that the applicant has considered the relevance and equivalency of their prior experiential learning to the appropriate learning outcomes and mapped that experiential learning against the stated learning outcomes of the programme for which exemption is being sought.
- b. Since it is the achievement of learning, or the outcomes of that learning, that is being accredited rather than the activity of learning itself, it is not enough for the applicant to list examples of their prior experiential learning – they must also show that they have reflected on the learning being described.
- c. It is up to each College to determine the structure of the portfolio they wish to use as an assessment tool. They will need to make decisions with regards to organisation, word limit, nature and volume of evidence required etc.
- d. Colleges that are prepared to consider APEL applications for their courses should draw up a portfolio model for usage so that APEL claimants have adequate information about what is expected of them prior to making an application for APEL.
- e. Admissions must be made aware of portfolio models agreed at College level.

#### 7.2.4 Other types of assessment

- a. Colleges may also wish to supplement the portfolio with other assessment tools as appropriate. For example, interviews, references, diagnostic test(s), pieces of work or special assignments. They should inform Admissions of their intention to use these assessment tools.
- b. Colleges may decide the most appropriate format for students to quantify their prior learning, in consultation with Admissions.
- c. It is important that all expectations with regard to the assessment of the APEL claim, including the workload for the applicant, are communicated at the earliest possible stage to the applicant.

7.2.5 It is recommended that Colleges carry out an initial assessment of any candidate wishing to pursue a claim solely on the basis of experiential learning, as a way of ensuring that only applicants with a good chance of being awarded credit proceed to portfolio. It is considered good practice for a College to conduct an interview with the prospective APEL applicant at this initial assessment stage whenever practical, as this is an opportunity to discuss the applicant's previous experience in detail and also articulate the amount of work involved in portfolio production.



### 7.3 Notification of the Decision

- 7.3.1 The relevant Admissions Tutor contact will complete the APL decision form and return it to the Admissions. The level and amount of any credit to be awarded, the credit required for the award and the titles and codes of the exempted modules must be stated on the decision form, with reasons for the decision.
- 7.3.2 Admissions will notify the applicant of the College's decision in writing.
- 7.3.3 If the application for APEL is successful the letter will state the amount of credit to be awarded and the titles of any exempted modules.
- 7.3.4 These exempted modules will be entered into the applicant's student record as APL modules by staff within Academic and Student Administration and will appear as such on student transcripts. Modules exempted via APEL appear on student transcripts as a 'Pass' but without a mark.
- 7.3.5 The Admissions Manager will copy the decision letter to colleagues in Academic and Student Administration and the Finance Office so that the applicant's tuition fees can be adjusted.
- 7.3.6 If the application is unsuccessful reasons for the decision will be given in the letter. If the applicant is not allowed to proceed to portfolio the College will notify them of the reasons for the decision.
- 7.3.7 Admissions will be unable to send the applicant a decision letter until such time as the applicant is holding an unconditional offer of a place on the programme they are claiming credit towards.
- 7.3.8 Due to the varied nature of APEL, claims decision times will vary. The Admissions Tutor should communicate an expected timeframe upon submission of the portfolio (or other assessment method).

### 7.4 APEL Costs

- 7.4.1 The non-refundable fee for processing an APEL application is payable upon submission of the application for credit.
- 7.4.2 The support required by APEL applicants is more intensive than for APCL applicants, due to the nature of the assessments involved.
- 7.4.3 If the claim is successful, the tuition fees will be reduced by the cost of any exempted modules.
- 7.4.4 Academic and Student Administration will calculate any reduction in tuition fees after an APEL decision letter has been sent to the applicant and their student record adjusted accordingly. If the decision has not been reached at the at the point of

registration when fees become liable, the student will be required to pay the full fee amount. Any credit accepted after this date will be refunded accordingly

## 8. DIRECT ENTRY

- 8.1 Regulations allow for entry into each year of a degree programme, although in practice it is unusual to allow entry to the final year. It is possible to grant credit for (and therefore grant exemption from) up to two thirds of a programme.
- 8.2 Direct entry is not appropriate for every programme at the University of Birmingham, nor will it be appropriate in every case. Prior to submitting their UCAS application the applicant is strongly advised to contact the relevant Admissions Tutor to discuss the feasibility of making a claim for direct entry for a particular course. The Admissions Tutor will be able to advise the applicant if the claim is appropriate.
- 8.3 Although regulations allow for exemption from up to two thirds of a programme, entry to the third year of a three-year degree programme is unlikely to be permitted.
- 8.4 Direct entry is only appropriate for those seeking exemption at the point of application from a whole year/level of an Undergraduate programme recruiting via UCAS.
- 8.5 Although direct entry is a separate process from APL, APL regulations concerning the validity, currency, sufficiency and authenticity of the applicant's previous studies still apply.
- 8.6 Applicants should only be permitted direct entry to a programme of study if both the College and Admissions are satisfied that the applicant's previous studies are equivalent to the learning that would otherwise have been achieved by following the complete programme of study. The applicant is expected to demonstrate equivalency and currency by providing sufficient evidence of their previous study.
- 8.7 Direct Entry Procedures
  - 8.7.1 The applicant must indicate their desired year of entry in the 'point of entry' section of the UCAS application form.
  - 8.7.2 It is the responsibility of the applicant to submit evidence in support of their claim for direct entry. Supporting evidence is likely to include an academic transcript and course syllabus, but the relevant admissions tutor will advise the applicant of the specific documentation required.
  - 8.7.3 The relevant Admissions Officer will make an initial assessment of the form as usual and will highlight the point of entry information for the attention of the Admissions Tutor. If there is insufficient supporting evidence of the applicant's previous study, the Admissions Officer will inform the Admissions Tutor of this and the applicant should be asked to provide additional evidence.
  - 8.7.4 It is the responsibility of the Admissions Tutor to inform applicants seeking direct entry if such a claim is appropriate in their case and to advise them accordingly. It is also the responsibility of the Admissions Tutor to assess an applicant's claim for direct entry in

conjunction with their application for admission to a course and subsequently to inform Admissions of their decision. The applicant's claim for direct entry cannot be assessed until such time as the applicant provides the Admissions Tutor with adequate supporting evidence of their previous studies.

- 8.7.5 If the Admissions Tutor grants the applicant direct entry to another year or level of the course, the relevant Admissions Officer will amend the applicant's student record in Banner to reflect the new point of entry. The Admissions Officer will also amend the point of entry in the offer letter sent to the applicant.
- 8.7.6 Any queries about APL regulations pertaining to the decision to grant a student direct entry to a programme of study should be referred to Admissions in the first instance.

## **9. WHEN IS AN ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL) CLAIM NOT REQUIRED?**

9.1 APL is only required in certain circumstances and should not be confused with other procedures within Admissions and Academic and Student Administration. This section sets out those circumstances in which the APL process does not apply and therefore in which the applicant will not be required to make an APCL or APEL claim.

9.1.1 The applicant is requesting entry to a course on the basis of non-standard qualifications and/or experience

- a. The assessment of an applicant's eligibility to enter a programme of study on the basis of non-standard qualifications and/or experience is not a matter for APL. Unless the applicant is also requesting exemption from a module or modules of a course run at the University of Birmingham (in which case they would be required to make a separate APCL or APEL claim) their application for admission will be assessed independently of the University's APL process.

9.1.2 The applicant is requesting Direct Entry to level I (Intermediate), or H (Honours), of an Undergraduate degree course at the point of application

- a. If an applicant is requesting direct entry to a year other than the first year of a standard Undergraduate degree (that is, entry to a level other than level C or Certificate level) at the point of application they should indicate their desired year of entry in the 'point of entry' section of the UCAS application form. The applicant's request will be considered in conjunction with their application for admission.

9.1.3 The student undertook but did not complete studies at the University of Birmingham no more than two years ago and now wishes to restart the same programme of study.

- a. [For example, a student completed 120 credits of a 180-credit Masters course in September 2007 and is asking to return and complete the course in September 2009]. If an individual left the University no more than two years ago after partially completing a programme of study and now wishes to restart the same programme it may be possible for the University to reactivate their existing student record, provided that they have not been awarded an alternative qualification for their previous study, and that the College who run the programme agrees. As the original

start date for the programme would still apply, it is essential for the College to check that the maximum period of registration has not expired.

- b. It will not be possible to reactivate an individual's record who was required to withdraw through academic failure. It will also not be possible to reactivate an individual's record if the uncompleted programme in question has since been restructured or withdrawn.

9.1.4 The University of Birmingham awarded the student a qualification no more than two years ago and the student wishes to return to study for a higher award of the same course.

- a. [For example, a student was awarded a PG Dip in Autism (Adults) in July 2007 and wishes to return and study for the MEd in Autism (Adults) in September 2009]. If an individual left the University no more than two years ago having been awarded a qualification and now wishes to return to study for a higher award of the same programme of study it may be possible for the University to directly transfer them to the higher award, provided that they return the degree certificate for their original award, and that the College who run the programme agrees to the transfer.

- b. It will not be possible to make a direct transfer if the programme in question has since been restructured or withdrawn.

9.1.5 The student wishes to transfer credits gained at the University of Birmingham into a degree offered by another Higher Educational Institution.

- a. Students requesting information about previous studies taken at the University of Birmingham for the purpose of APCL at another Higher Educational Institution should contact the Registry to obtain an academic transcript.

## 10. APPEALS

10.1 Appeals must be made in writing to the Director of Admissions within one month of the decision outcome.

10.2 The Director will review decisions where there is evidence that the appropriate process was not followed or where there is additional evidence that was not available at the time the original decision was made.

10.3 The Director will confirm his final decision to the applicant normally within 10-days of the appeal being received. This may take longer, depending on the investigation required.

## 11. FURTHER INFORMATION

11.1 Further information about frameworks for Higher Education qualifications can be found on the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) and QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) websites: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) and [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)